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Convention to Combat Desertification

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REPORT OF THE BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Decision 16/COP.3, on the work programme of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), requests the secretariat to facilitate the convening of at least one inter-sessional Bureau meeting of the Committee for the review of decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties (COP) and other related matters regarding the work of the Committee, especially the planning and organization of the next session of the Committee.

2. Pursuant to that decision, the secretariat organized a CST Bureau meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from 14 to 15 August 2001. The agenda of that meeting and the list of documents submitted for consideration are contained in annexes I and II; the list of participants is in annex III.

3. Following the opening of the meeting, the President of the CST and members of the secretariat welcomed members of the CST Bureau and experts attending the meeting. The agenda of work for the CST Bureau meeting was introduced and adopted.

II. REVIEW OF THE AGENDA OF THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE CST, THE ROSTER OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS AND THE HELP GUIDE

Review of the CST agenda

4. Following a review of the agenda for the fifth session of the CST, Bureau members recommended that the report of the CST on traditional knowledge should be included in the Bureau's report, which will be presented to the CST on 2 October 2001.

5. Bureau members recommended that the agenda for the afternoon of 2 October should be devoted to a discussion on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, as well as addressing the issue of the roster of independent expert; discussion on issues related to benchmarks and indicators, the revisions to the help guide, and traditional knowledge should be moved to the morning of 3 October 2001.

6. Bureau members were informed by the secretariat that the changes to the agenda of the CST would be proposed when the agenda for the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties will be considered for adoption.

Review of the roster of independent experts

7. The secretariat introduced the topic of a review of the roster of independent experts by referring to decision 15/COP.4. The secretariat indicated that several nominations to the roster by Parties could not be included in the roster because Parties did not follow formal diplomatic channels, as agreed upon in previous decisions.

8. Bureau members expressed concern about a continued gender imbalance, and the under-representation of certain disciplines, as well as representatives from civil society on the roster. Bureau members proposed that Parties should address these imbalances in the future. The need to encourage Parties to follow the agreed-upon procedures to submit nominations to the roster was also underlined by Bureau members.

Revisions to the help guide

9. Pursuant to decision 10/COP.4, the secretariat presented a draft of proposed revisions to the help guide as contained in document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/5. Bureau members proposed a number of changes to the document, which were noted by the secretariat. These amendments will be included in the proposed revisions to the help guide.

III. REPORT OF THE AD HOC PANEL ON EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

10. Pursuant to decision 14/COP.4, the Chairman of the ad hoc panel on early warning systems (EWSs) presented the report of the ad hoc panel, and Bureau members made a number of comments. The importance of integrating work done on benchmarks and indicators, as well as traditional knowledge, into EWSs for drought and food security was highlighted, as well as desertification monitoring and assessment. The Chairman of the ad hoc panel suggested the need to undertake pilot studies in different ecological regions to capitalize on the work of the panel; in addition, the Chairman suggested that experts could undertake different socio-economic studies on EWSs, which would be relevant to the decision-making process by governments and civil society.

11. Bureau members noted with appreciation the report of the ad hoc panel, and suggested that Parties should examine carefully the report, since it contains all the elements needed to address desertification and drought issues. Bureau members indicated that the terms of reference of the panel had been addressed satisfactorily, and agreed that there was no further work required of the ad hoc panel.

12. It was noted that the report of the panel and the background papers presented during the panel's meeting were of high quality, and contained useful information of relevance to Parties; and that it would be worthwhile sharing the information with Parties. The secretariat was requested to liaise with the Chairman of the panel to ensure the report and background papers are published in an appropriate forum and disseminated.

13. Bureau members agreed that Parties should consider developing strategies to use the approaches to EWSs contained in the report of the ad hoc panel, perhaps through a pilot study in several countries or within a region, in order to test these approaches.

IV. REPORT ON BENCHMARKS AND INDICATORS

14. In accordance with decision 11/COP.4, representatives from the Sahara and the Sahel Observatory (OSS) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) presented a report on the progress made with regard to an initiative on benchmarks and indicators, contained in document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/7. A number of comments were made by Bureau members on the report.

15. The CST Bureau took note of the report, and requested representatives from CILSS and OSS to present a more comprehensive report to the fifth session of the COP, taking into account some of the issues raised by Bureau members.

V. MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

16. In accordance with decision 18/COP.4 in which the secretariat was requested to follow closely the activities of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), a representative of the MEA was invited to make a presentation on the status of the MEA to Bureau members.

17. The Bureau noted with appreciation the presentation on the MEA, and considered a number of areas for potential collaboration between the MEA and the CST including the following: an assessment of land degradation, particularly at the national and local levels, without neglecting the global and sub-global levels, for a full comprehension of the relationships between them; institutional and human capacity development targeted towards issues of relevance to the convention; increasing public awareness about the convention, the development of benchmarks and indicators, particularly impact indicators; and the development of synergies between environmental conventions. In particular, Bureau members noted the need to identify impacts at the local level of relevance to the Convention.

18. Bureau members recommended that the CST, through well-defined and feasible mechanisms, should continue to identify and refine areas of collaboration with the MEA, either at a country or a regional level.

VI. REALIZATION OF A PILOT PROJECT OF A NETWORK OF INSTITUTIONS, BODIES AND EXPERTS ON TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

19. In response to decision 12/COP.4, document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/2 containing a proposal from Italian authorities for the realization of a pilot project of a network of institutions, bodies and experts on traditional knowledge was presented by the secretariat, in the absence of a representative from the Government of Italy.

20. The Bureau noted the proposal, and authorized the secretariat to forward it in the name of the CST Bureau to the regional groups for review and consideration at the fifth session of the CST.

VII. SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF EXISTING NETWORKS

21. In accordance with decision 13/COP.4, the CST Bureau considered the survey and evaluation of existing networks to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. With regard to the issue of funding for phase 2 of the survey and evaluation, the secretariat noted that in spite of its efforts, to date no contributions have been received from Parties towards the budget of US$ 655,000. Due to the lack of funds, the secretariat has been unable to enter into a contract with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

22. The UNEP representative described the results of an evaluation of phase one of the survey and evaluation of existing networks, undertaken by an independent organ.

23. Having considered the evaluation, Bureau members noted that it was positive, given that the objectives of phase one had been achieved. The Bureau also noted that the recommendations to strengthen phase 2, which were identified in the evaluation, had been incorporated into phase 2.

24. In conjunction with its consortium members, UNEP has considered ways to reduce the cost of phase 2, including the possibility of reducing the proposed number of countries within the Southern African region. It was noted that by reducing the number of countries from 18 to 10 to be included into phase 2, savings equal to one-third of the original proposed budget would result, bringing the total budget for phase 2 to approximately US$ 450,000.

25. The CST Bureau requested UNEP, on behalf of its consortium members, to submit a revised proposal to the secretariat by 27 August 2001. The Bureau recommended that Parties consider the revised proposal at COP 5, and strongly encouraged Parties to consider funding either the initial proposal submitted by UNEP at COP 4, or the revised proposal, given the importance of this initiative to the Convention.

VIII. DRYLAND DEGRADATION ASSESSMENT

26. In accordance with decision 18/COP.4, the secretariat presented a report on the status of activities related to the Dryland Degradation Assessment (LADA), noting that the GEF Secretariat has indicated a number of concerns with a proposal submitted to it by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) under a Project Development Fund and Preparation Facility Block B Grant (PDF-B).

27. The Bureau noted the report of the secretariat, as well as the concerns about the PDF-B proposal as expressed by the GEF Secretariat. Recognizing the importance of the LADA initiative, the Bureau requested the secretariat to pursue discussions with the FAO and UNEP to determine whether these organizations wish to revise the PDF-B proposal to the GEF Secretariat; should their response be positive, Bureau members requested the secretariat to collaborate with the secretariat of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which has offered to undertake an assessment of needs or "gap analysis", and to develop methodologies which could strengthen the proposal. Taking note of the importance of the two initiatives, namely LADA and the MEA, the Bureau has requested the secretariat to keep the CST informed about developments in the future.

IX. STRATEGIES FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION

28. In accordance with decision 16/COP.4, document ICCD/COP(5)/CST/6 was introduced by the secretariat, which noted that only two submissions have been received from Parties and other interested organizations. The secretariat indicated its intent to develop a series of questions on the subject of the communication of information, in order to help stimulate discussion at COP 5.

29. The Bureau took note of the synthesis prepared by the secretariat, and considered possible reasons for the low level of response, including the complexity of the issue, as well as a lack of well-defined strategies and approaches for Parties to provide feedback on tasks agreed upon at CST meetings. A number of options were proposed to address this issue: 1) when programs of work are identified, during the following COP, at least one-half day should be set aside for discussion of the reports of Parties selected on the basis of regional representation; and 2) Parties should consider publishing these submissions in an appropriate form as an added incentive, and for the purposes of sharing information.

X. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE CST

30. A number of suggestions regarding the future work programme of the CST was considered by the Bureau, including the following: the publication of background papers on early warning systems for drought and desertification; initiation of a pilot study to test some of the approaches and tools identified in the report of the ad hoc panel on EWSs; benchmarks and indicators, in particular impact indicators, using similar methods that are currently utilized by various organizations; collaboration with the MEA; phase two of the survey and evaluation of existing networks; and continuing work on the communication of information.

XI. CST PROGRAMME OF WORK IN THE LONGER-TERM

31. Bureau members considered a number of issues under this topic, while noting that discussions on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST will influence the CST's programme of work over the next several years. Bureau members highlighted the importance of focusing on local and national levels in initiatives undertaken by the CST, of developing methodologies to address the UNCCD's needs, and of exploring mechanisms for collaboration with other environmental initiatives.

32. The Bureau recommended developing close collaboration between the CST and the science bodies of the other environmental conventions, as well as between the CST and the thematic programming networks (TPNs). The need for the CST to continuously examine mechanisms to improve its performance was also noted.

XII. CONCLUSION

33. Bureau members requested the secretariat to ensure that the present Chairman of the CST, or alternatively one of the Vice-Chairs, be present at COP 5 in order to submit the Bureau's report.

34. The Chairman made an oral summary of the two-day meeting of the CST Bureau, and thanked Bureau members, invited experts, and the secretariat for their contributions which helped to ensure a productive meeting.

Annex I

AGENDA

14-15 August 2001, Geneva, Switzerland
Palais des Nations

Tuesday, 14 August 2001

09:00 - 09:15	Opening statement by the CST Chairman, Dr. Olanrewaju Smith
09:15 - 09:30	Welcoming remarks by a representative of the UNCCD secretariat
09:30 - 09:45	Adoption of programme of work and the agenda of Bureau Meeting
09:45 - 10:15	Topic 1: Review of the agenda of the CST 5
10:15 - 10:30	Topic 2: The roster of independent experts
10:30 - 11:15	Discussion of topic 2: comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman
11:30 - 12:00	Topic 3: Survey and evaluation of existing networks
12:00 - 12:30	Discussion of topic 3: comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman
14:00 - 14:30	Topic 4: Report of ad hoc panel meeting on early warning systems
14:30 - 16:30	Discussion of topic 4: report of ad hoc panel meeting on early warning systems, comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman
16:45 - 17:15	Topic 5: Report on traditional knowledge
17:15 - 18:00	Discussion of topic 5: report on traditional knowledge, comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman

Wednesday, 15 August 2001

09:00 - 10:00	Topic 6: Report on benchmarks and indicators Discussion of topic 6: comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman
10:00 - 11:00	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), Presentation and discussion
11:15 - 12:30	Topic 7: Discussion on the future CST work programme within the framework of the Convention to Combat Desertification

14:00 - 14:30	Discussion of topic 7: comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman
14:30 - 15:00	Topic 8: Reflection, broad projection and tendencies of the CST possible programme in the coming years
15:00 - 15:30	Discussion of topic 8
15:45 - 17:30	Continuation of discussion of topic 8: comments, remarks and views. Summary by the Chairman
17:30 - 18:00	Conclusion of the meeting

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

1. ICCD/COP(5)/CST/1: Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

2. ICCD/COP(5)/CST/2: Proposal of the Government of Italy for the realization of a pilot project of a network of institutions, bodies and experts on traditional knowledge

3. Survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies: Desk evaluation report of phase one

4. ICCD/COP(5)/CST/4: Early Warning Systems: Report of the ad hoc panel

5. ICCD/COP(5)/CST/5: Proposal on ways to revise the help guide with regard to the presentation of national reports in order to help Parties to better note in their report activities undertaken by the community and by scientific institutions

6. ICCD/COP(5)/CST/6: Strategies for the communication of information and its use to generate best practices for combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought

7. ICCD/COP(5)/CST/7: Benchmarks and indicators: the report of the OSS and CILSS on monitoring-evaluation of impact and implementation indicators for action programmes to combat desertification

8. ICCD/COP(5)/5 and Add.1: Committee on Science and Technology: Maintenance of the roster of experts

9. ICCD/COP(5)/Inf.7: Dryland Degradation Assessment (LADA); Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA): Strengthening capacity to manage ecosystems sustainably for human well-being; and identification of user needs

10. ICCD/COP(5)/3/Add.2: Synthesis on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee on Science and Technology

Annex III

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Dr. Olanrewaju B. Smith, Chairman of the CST, Canada

2. Mr. Mebrahtu Iyassu, Vice-Chairman of the CST, Eritrea

3. Mr. Enrique Ochoa, Third Secretary, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations Office in Geneva

4. Dr. John Ehrmann, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, United States of America

5. Dr. Kazuhiko Takeuchi, Chairman of the Ad hoc panel on early warning systems, Japan

6. Mr. Youssef Brahimi, The Sahara and the Sahel Observatory (OSS), Tunisia

7. Mr. Francois Tapsoba, Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), Burkina Faso

8. Mr. Timo Maukonen, UNEP Representative, Kenya

9. Mr. Ahmed Cissoko, UNCCD

10. Ms. Jan Sheltinga, UNCCD

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